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TESTIMONY OF REPRESENTATIVE ELISSA WRIGHT
STATE REPRESENTATIVE, 41ST DISTRICT

Raised Senate Bill No. 415, AN ACT ESTABLISHING ADDITIONAL SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTERS.

Public Health Committee - March 14, 2014

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, members of the Public Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at this public hearing in support of ***Raised Senate Bill No. 415, An Act Concerning Additional School-Based Health Centers.***

School-based health centers have proven effective in the delivery of preventative and primary health care to children and adolescents in the Town of Groton and throughout the state. Among the health services provided are: diagnosis and treatment of acute injuries and illnesses; routine check-ups; physical exams, including physicals for school entry and for sports; immunizations; prescriptions and dispensing of medications; nutrition counseling; and a variety of mental and behavioral health services.

By providing basic health care to students, school-based health centers also reduce absences and improve academic performance of all students. More than 1800 students currently are enrolled in the five school-based health centers (SBHC) in Groton – at two elementary schools, the two middle schools and the high school.

As currently configured, the five SBHCs in Groton schools provide a continuity of excellent care for students from Claude Chester Elementary School and Catherine Kolnaksi Magnet School (an elementary school), who then attend either West Side Middle School or Cutler Middle School and eventually Fitch High School.

By establishing new SBHCs at Pleasant Valley Elementary School and Mary Morrisson Elementary School, our request would provide the same continuity of care to the students at each of these schools, which are feeder schools to West Side Middle School, with a small percentage of students moving up to Cutler Middle School.

With funding for services of two full-time Masters-level mental health clinicians (one at each school) and one full-time nurse practitioner to cover the medical services (half-time at each school), these proposed new clinics would provide access to health care for these students – of whom nearly 38.3% at Mary Morrisson and 37.9% at Pleasant Valley are eligible for free/reduced-priced meals – leading to enhanced lifetime health, economic prospects, and well-being.

Groton is not a priority school district, but it is home to the largest military installation in Connecticut. Fully 61% of the students attending Mary Morrisson Elementary School and one-third of students attending Pleasant Valley Elementary School are from military families.ⁱ

While military dependents are covered by TRICARE and primary care is available on the submarine base and in the community, transportation and scheduling issues for working parents remain at least an equal challenge for Navy families as for the general population. Moreover, it is my understanding that mental health/behavioral health services on the submarine base have been reduced over the years, and TRICARE's more rigorous credentialing requirements have had the effect of restricting the pool of mental health providers eligible for TRICARE reimbursement.

Many Navy families depend on the school-based health centers to care for their children. Deployed, active-duty parents want more than anything else is to know that their child's physical and mental health needs are being met back home.

The proposed new school-based health centers at Pleasant Valley Elementary School and Mary Morrisson Elementary School would be ideally situated to meet those needs, providing barrier-free access especially when a parent is deployed on active military duty or working outside the home in order to meet family expenses.

In light of our state and national focus on improving access to quality and affordable health care, one solution for increasing access, ensuring affordability and prevention lies in the proven record of the school-based health center system.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be heard and I welcome any comments or questions you may have.

ⁱ The district-wide average of students in Groton Public Schools from military families is 37%.